

The Web vs. Library Databases – A comparison

	<u>The Web</u> (Google, Wikipedia, About.com, etc.)	<u>Databases</u> (Academic Search, Lexis-Nexis, etc.)
Authority	Varies at best. Difficult to verify. Cannot limit to professional, scholarly literature. Information on the Web is seldom regulated, which means authority is often in doubt.	Easy to determine. Most databases have scholarly/peer-reviewed filter or contain only scholarly literature. Authority and trustworthiness are virtually guaranteed.
Number of Hits	1000's, sometimes millions of hits, much of the same information repackaged or duplicated. Duplicates are not filtered out.	Dozens to hundreds of hits (sometimes 1000's but not 100's of 1000's) - a more manageable number, and duplicates can be filtered out.
Relevance	Lack of subject focus can result in numerous irrelevant hits – or “junk” – to wade through. Much Web information is opinionated and biased. Unless you are using a subject-specific search engine, expect “everything and the kitchen sink” in the results. Quantity ≠ Quality	Focus by subject (business, art, American history) and/or format (journals, books, book reviews), which often means more relevant information and less time wasted dealing with junk. Information comes from legitimate, quality-controlled sources.
Search Features	Varies by search engine, but often limited. Can limit by document type (.doc, .pdf) or language, but limiting by publication date, format (article, book, etc.), scholarly/peer-reviewed and more is unavailable.	Numerous advanced search features determined by database subject focus, e.g., limiting by publication type, date, language, document format, scholarly/peer-reviewed status. The list of features is as long as the number of databases available.
Access to Published Information	Web information often lives and dies on the Web and can come from anyone with Internet access. Seldom is the information coming from legitimate published sources: magazines, academic journals, books, etc. When it is, the user usually has to <u>pay</u> to access it.	Databases deal <u>only</u> with published information; that is information that originally appeared in print: magazine and journal articles, books, etc. They are more stable than the Web. Through the library's paid access, all of this information is available to you, the user, for <u>free</u> .

5 Criteria for Evaluating Web Sites (Applicable to Any Media):

To determine whether a site's contents (or **any** media's contents – books, newspapers, television, etc.) can be trusted, it is best that that you carefully **evaluate** the site. See below for questions to ask when determining whether a site (or other media) contains sound information.

1. **Audience** – To whom is the site directed – children, adults, students; a certain ethnicity, gender or political affiliation? Is it understandable by the layman, or is it highly technical requiring specialized knowledge?
2. **Authority** – Is the author of the site listed? Can you determine his/her expertise? Is contact information given – phone number, address, e-mail? With what organization is he/she associated?
3. **Bias** - Does the language, tone, or treatment of its subject give the site a particular slant or bias? Is the site objective? Is it designed to sway opinion? Organizational affiliation can often indicate bias.
4. **Currency** – Is the site up-to-date with working links? Are dates given for when it was created and last updated? Is the topic current?
5. **Scope** – Is the site an in-depth study of the topic going several pages deep, or is it a superficial, single-page look at the subject? Are statistics and sources referenced properly cited? Does the site offer unique information not found anywhere else, e.g., print sources?

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